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ABSTRACT

The research in this paper was designed to assess the role of the individual state in directing and supervising curriculum matters within the state. Fifty surveys were mailed to the State Education Departments in each of the 50 states. Questions 1-5 of the survey were designed to determine the number of districts in each state, the number of students in each district, the amount of money spent on education at the state level, and the percentage of funds being directed toward education. These factors were included in order to see if they related to the type and magnitude of state control. The rest of the survey dealt with the specific type of state control exhibited by each state. It also asked the state to make an estimate of the amount of control it has over (1) subject matter, (2) implementation or methods, and (3) evaluation of existing curriculum. Of the 50 surveys distributed, 36 were returned. The results indicated that states have minimal control over local school districts. Regional differences were evident, with southern states exhibiting greater control than other retions. The results were interpreted to suggest that states should increase their involvement in curriculum revision. (RC)

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STATE CONTROL OF CURRICULUM

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INTRODUCTION

Research on the development of curriculum has mushroomed in the past few years. At least 20 articles per month are published on curriculum development with much emphasis being placed on new and revised methods for curriculum implementation, materials for use in presenting information and discussions regarding the value of certain areas in preparing students for adult roles.

The research of this paper is not concerned with adding to this multitude of published articles on curriculum development or the effectiveness of one teaching technique over another. Nor is it concerned with comparing the effectiveness of one text over another. Instead, this research is concerned with the responsibility for controlling the curriculum of the public school.

Previous publications have not directed themselves to determine the institution or individuals responsible for controlling curriculum or the amount of control exercised by those who do have authority. Instead, the implicit assumptions underlying the publications were that the individual or institution making curriculum decisions was unimportant and that as long as the decisions were made, this was satisfactory.

It is readily apparent that the responsibility for controlling curriculum is a large one.

Figure 1 represents the educational hierarchy. It is possible that curriculum decisions could be made at any level of the hierarchy. If curriculum decisions are made by the smallest intact

educational group, then every teacher in each individual classroom in the United States would have this responsibility and each class could conceivably have its own unique curriculum. If curriculum decisions were made at the highest level, i.e., the Federal Government, then the teacher in each classroom would not have decision responsibility and every classroom in the United States might possibly follow the same curriculum guidelines.

In the first case, where decisions were made at the micro level, one would expect a very large variance in curriculum between classes, schools, districts, regions and states. If decisions regarding curriculum were made at the macro level of the educational hierarchy then there would be very small differences in curriculum among the branches of the hierarchy.

The only research concerned with the level at which curriculum decisions are made (LaPorte, 1975) indicates that curriculum decisions are made among the lowest levels of the hierarchy. The major decisions on curriculum were determined within the individual districts yet are quite variant across local district boundaries. School districts only a few miles apart had totally different curriculum patterns.

The dissemination of information about curriculum across the local boundaries appeared to be quite poor. It was argued that the variance of curriculum patterns or guidelines should be decreased along with an increase of curricula information dissemination so that eventually ineffective or irrelevant guidelines could be weeded out and replaced by more efficient and relevant material. It was suggested that in order for this to be done, the responsibility for making curriculum decisions

had to be removed from the micro level of the school districts and awarded to a higher level within the hierarchy.

By placing curriculum decisions at a higher level, three purposes would be served. First, curriculum implementation would be more rapid. Second, the variance of curriculum among local districts would decrease, and thirdly, the dissemination of curriculum information would be improved through centralization.

It was suggested that the level which could most effectively handle curriculum matters was the State Boards of Education.

Before curriculum responsibility could be transferred to the State level from the local level, it is necessary to understand the present role of the State in curriculum decision-making. This is the concern of the present research.

Previous research (LaPorte, 1975) has indicated that the State controls curriculum in four major ways. The State produces curriculum guidelines (both mandatory and non-mandatory); it monitors existing curriculum; it measures curriculum effectiveness by giving statewide examinations or it recommends or requires specific curriculum measurement tools.

It is apparent that the greatest degree of control by the State is where curriculum guides are mandatory. In a situation such as this, the local districts do not decide which type of curriculum should be used. Less powerful are the secondary controls of monitoring, statewide exams, non-mandatory guidelines and curriculum measurement tools. The secondary controls are much less powerful because of the autonomy of the local school boards in making these decisions.

The present research was designed to assess the role of the individual state in directing and supervising curriculum matters within the State. The survey that was developed was concerned with the control States have over the individual districts, what type of controls are used by each individual state, how the control relates to the quality of education and whether there are regional differences among the types of control.

METHOD

Fifty (50) surveys were distributed, by mail, to each of the State Education Departments in each of the fifty states. The surveys were directed to the State Education Department supervisors.

A cover letter (attachment 1) accompanied each survey (attachment 2.) A self-addressed, stamped envelope was provided.

Description of the Survey.

Background: Part I. Questions 1-5 were included in order to determine the number of districts in each state, the number of students in each district, the amount of money spent on education at the State level and the percentage of State funds being directed toward education. These factors were included in order to see if they related to the type and magnitude of State control.

Curriculum: Part II. This section of the survey deals with the specific type of state control exhibited by each State. Secondly, it asked the State to make an estimate of the amount of control it has in three specific areas: Subject Matter, Implementation or methods, and evaluation of exisitng curriculum.

A breakdown of the questions would be:

Which States use guidelines for education?(Questions 6 - 10)

What is the role of the State in monitoring existing curriculum? (Questions 10 - 12)

Which States administer statewide examinations? (Question 13)

Do the States use particular tools to measure curriculum effectiveness? (Question 14)

RESULTS

Of the 50 surveys distributed, 36 were returned (72%). There was no systematic differences as to the area of the country and the probability of returning a survey.

Curriculum Control. The States were asked to estimate the degree of control of the local school districts in three major areas: subject matter control, methods of teaching, and evaluation of existing curricula. The States indicated that they had the largest degree of control over deciding which subject matter should be presented (mean= 33.5% control). There was much less control over how the subject matter would be presented (mean=4.8% control) and how the curriculum was to be evaluated (13.8% control.) The difference among the three groups proved to be significant $F(2,63)=8.02$ $p < .01$) demonstrating that the degree of control in different areas was not the same.

Type of Curriculum Control. Most States do have some type of control over curriculum within the local school districts. Only two states (Massachusetts and Maine) indicated that they do not have any control over curriculum. Examination of Table 1 reveals that there is a difference in the frequency of usage of different types of state control. A chi square test demonstrated a significant difference $\chi^2(4)=32.75$ $p < .01$ among the frequency of occurance of the five types of control It is clear that the type of control that is most favored by the States was the type that preievered the autonomy of the local school districts' curriculum decisions.

In only 11.1% of the cases were the local school districts required to follow specific curriculum set-ups by the State (the States that indicated mandatory guidelines were Arizona, North Dakota, Oregon, and South Carolina.) The primary types of curriculum control were the types where the school districts decided curricula that would be implemented within the individual districts.

Table 2 presents a classification of the states toward the degree of state control. The largest degree of control is represented by the number 5 group where there are mandatory guidelines. States are further classified as to the number of secondary controls reported in use in the states given that there was not evidence of primary control. A chi square test on the frequency of occurence indicated that there was a significant difference as to the degree of state control $\chi(4)=15.33$ $p < .01$. This result demorstrated that some states have significantly greater control of the individual school districts than other states.

The bottom line of Table 2 presents the proportion of students completing high school given that they were in ninth grade in that state. The interest was whether the degree of state control related to the quality of education. The percentage of students graduating was taken as an indicator of the quality of education.

An analysis of variance was done on the percentage scores for the five groups having at least two scores per cell. The F test among the five groups was non-significant ($(F(4,30)=1.27$ $p < .05)$).

Regional Differences. There appears to be a differences in the type of control exhibited in the states as a function of the region. Table 3 presents a breakdown of the type of control as a function of the geographical area. The percentages represent the proportion of the States replying within the areas represented. It is apparent that the southern and Western areas of the country have more mandatory control plus more secondary controls than the other areas of the country.

DISCUSSION

A brief review of the results concerning the role of the State in the control of curriculum is in order. It was apparent that the States have very little control over curriculum within the local school districts. Some evidence of control was found, but only in the area of designating subject matter. There was no indication that States had designed or were using a specific measurement tool to evaluate the effectiveness of their curriculum guidelines.

Although the States did exhibit some control in the determination of subject matter, it averaged less than 35% control. Secondly, most States had some sort of control over the curriculum. The control, however, was often secondary in nature where the State monitored and suggested curriculum rather than directed it or gave assistance in its implementation. The range of control appeared to vary from low control to no control of curriculum within local districts.

There was a difference in State control as a function of region, with the East and Central areas of the United State having less control over curriculum than the Southern or Western States.

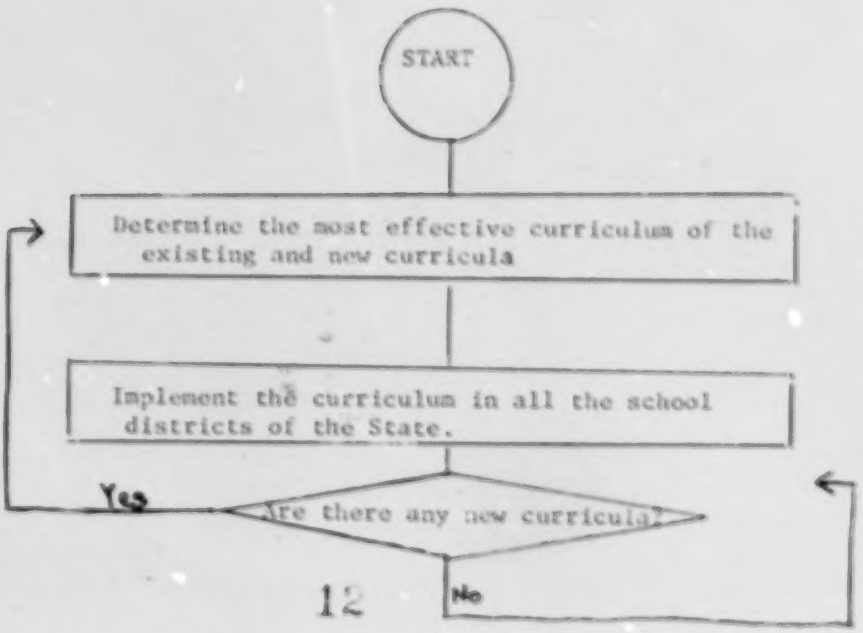
The present research did not find a significant relationship between the quality of education (as measured by high school graduates) and the degree of State control. This finding is not too disturbing to the premise that an increase in State control would yield better or more efficient educational systems. The reasoning here is that none of the States surveyed have a high degree of control. The range of control

by the States never approaches the power of the local districts.

The most striking finding of the survey was the non-control of curriculum by the States. The State governments collect and distribute tax monies, yet they have miniscule power in determining how these monies will be used to develop the educational systems under their umbrella. With a laisse-faire attitude such as this it is apparent that this attitude would promulgate the variance in curriculum evident in the results of this research.

It is argued that the states have need to set aside their attitude of laisse-faire and examine what is actually occuring within the school districts. After examination, it is necessary to increase the control of the State in order to make curriculum more similar and consistent across the local districts.

An efficient model of curriculum decision-making may be represented by the flow chart below.


START
Determine the most effective curriculum of the existing and new curricula
Implement the curriculum in all the school districts of the State.
Are there any new curricula?
Yes
No

Stage 1 of the flow chart provides a means whereby existing curricula may be experimentally compared to determine which is the most efficient. Clearly much work has to be done in this area to determine what the proper curriculum measurement tools are. Too much time and effort have been expended in the development of curriculum with too little effort in the measurement of effectiveness.

The second part of the model is the implementation stage. After the most efficient curriculum has been established, then it should be instituted in all school districts within the State. The third part of the model is a process for change whereby new curriculum is constantly being prepared and compared with existing curricula. If the new curricula is found to be significantly more effective (practical, efficient, etc.)then the curriculum is the State should be changed. If the new curricula is the same or worse (in effectiveness measured by practical statistics) then a change of a different type would be made.

The three-step procedure would rapidly decrease the variance among the local school districts plus provide an efficient experimentally-defined means for change. The recommended system would force the State to take an extremly active role in the determination of curriculum. This procedure would clearly be more effective than the non-system of curriculum decision-making in effect at the present time at the State level.

Figure 1.

The Educational Hierarchy

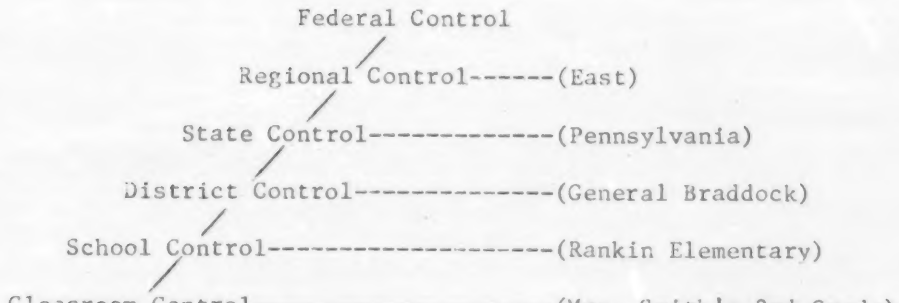


Table 1.

State Control	Per Cent
Mandatory Guidelines	11.1
Monitor Curriculum	50.0
Statewide Exams	50.0
Non-Mandatory Guidelines	83.3
Curriculum Evaluation Tool	11.1

Table 2.

Degree of State Control

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Number of States	2	12	12	5	1	4
Mean Percent Graduating	78.8	81.5	79.3	71.5	79.5	79.0

0 indicates no primary or secondary control.

1 indicates no primary control; one secondary control.

2 indicates no primary control; two secondary controls.

3 indicates no primary control, three secondary controls.

4 indicates no primary control; four secondary controls.

5 indicates primary control.

Table 3.

Regional Control

	EAST	SOUTH	CENTRAL	WEST
Mandatory Guidelines	0.0	12.0	12.0	28.6
Monitored Curriculum	50.0	75.0	30.0	50.0
Statewide Exams	37.5	62.5	20.0	37.5
Non-Mandatory Guidelines	62.5	100.0	80.0	87.5
Curriculum Evaluation Tool	27.3	0.0	0.0	12.5

ATTACHMENT 1

Apt. 301
500 East Bruceton Rd.
Pittsburgh, Pa. 15236
October 7, 1974

Dear Sir:

The attached questionnaire deals with the role of the State with respect to the curriculum of individual public schools. It is being distributed to all State Education departments throughout the United States and your cooperation in completing this questionnaire is requested.

Specifically, the questionnaire will be used as a research experiment at the University of Pittsburgh and is the basis for a thesis required for a Master's Degree in Education.

I would appreciate receiving your response no later than October 31, 1974 and have enclosed a self-addressed, stamped envelope for your convenience.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Diane H. LaPorte

(Mrs.)Diane H. LaPorte

1. Approximately how many local school districts are located in the State? _ _____.

2. Approximately how many students (ages 5 - 18) attend school in the State? _____.

3. Approximately how many teachers are employed in the State? _____.

4. What amount of money was spent in 1973 for education at the State level? _____. Approximately how much of this amount was collected in taxes? _____.

5. What per cent of the State's annual budget is directed toward education? _____.

6. Does the State publish curriculum guidelines (outlines or material used as a reference for preparation of subjects to be taught at a particular level)? _____.

7. How often, on the average, are these guidelines published? _____.

8. Of those schools that receive the guidelines, approximately what per cent of the schools use them as a basis for their curriculum? _____.

9. Do all schools within the State receive guidelines? _____ .

10. Is the use of State curriculum guidelines mandatory? _____ .

11. Does the State monitor the curriculum of each individual school district? _____. If so, how often is each reviewed? _____.

12. Are local school districts required to submit their curricula to the State for approval prior to implementation? _____.

13. Are Statewide examinations given to the students at any time? _____. If so, at which levels? _____ .

14. Does the State require or recommend any particular tool of measurement for evaluating the effectiveness of a given curriculum? _____. If so, what tool is recommended? _____.

15. Please indicate the amount of control by the State, in percent for the following:

_____ SUBJECT MATTER (0 - 100%)

_____ IMPLEMENTATION OR METHODS (0 - 100%)

_____ EVALUATION OF EXISTING CURRICULA (0 - 100%)

16. Are Statewide Achievement Test scores available? _____. If so, where can they be obtained? _____.

17. What per cent of students throughout the State complete high school? _____.

18. Of those students who complete high school, what per cent go on to a 4-year college degree program? _____.

19. Of those students who take the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test or College Boards) what is the average score for the State? _____ .

REFERENCES

LaPorte, D. H., & LaPorte, R. E. The dynamics of curriculum change. Research in Education, 1975 (in press)